



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES ARMY MANEUVER CENTER OF EXCELLENCE
1 KARKER STREET
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA 31905-5000

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

ATZB-DT

15 August 2014

MEMORANDUM FOR All Students, Maneuver Captains Career Course

SUBJECT: Mandatory Reading Assignment

1. Effective immediately, I am directing that all officers assigned to the Maneuver Captains Career Course read the following book to supplement MCCC classroom instruction: *Black Hearts: One Platoon's Descent into Madness in Iraq's Triangle of Death*, by Jim Frederick.
2. The purpose of assigning a common book to all students is to generate widespread discussion and sharing of ideas on common themes, to include combat leadership, health of the force, and the human dimension of war. Equally important, this assignment should contribute to the course's overall goal of inculcating a desire to be a lifelong learner.
3. I encourage each of you to read with a critical eye. Your goal should not be to simply castigate and criticize the leaders portrayed in the book. We should recognize and appreciate the fact that they operated under austere conditions and in periods of extreme stress. Your goal should be to analyze how decisions, leadership techniques, and employment of available assets contributed to outcomes and how different decisions, leadership techniques, and employment of available assets might have changed those outcomes. I offer the following questions and thoughts for you to consider as you read this book:
 - a. Why did so many problems occur in this one platoon while other platoons within the same company did not appear to have the same difficulties?
 - b. Consider the toxic effect of a single junior enlisted Soldier on the overall morale of the platoon. Should the leadership have done more to separate this Soldier from the Army? If so, what more could have been done?
 - c. Consider the "descent" described by the author. Look for critical decision points along the way to "madness," where a different decision by a leader might have stopped the deadly spiral of events that resulted in a war crime being committed.
 - d. As you read the book, think about the coping strategies you might employ as a leader following the tragic loss of close comrades in combat.
 - e. Consider the importance of providing a clear task and purpose for all Soldiers and providing them constant feedback and insights into how their efforts fit into the overall mission of the company, battalion, and brigade. How effectively did the chain of command convey this task and purpose? How could leaders have conveyed task, purpose, and impact on the mission more effectively?
 - f. What steps could the chain of command have taken, if any, to more effectively mitigate the effects of prolonged combat stress, lack of sleep, and constant fear of injury or death?

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g. How could company leaders have more effectively argued their case to battalion headquarters when they believed Soldiers' lives were being put at risk for little to no tactical gain?

4. In addition to the discussion generated among students, I expect Small Group Leaders to dedicate at least one hour of class time to address the questions posed above once all students have had an opportunity to read this book.

5. For those students who do not wish to incur the expense of purchasing the book, the MCoE's Donovan Library has several copies available and is in the process of acquiring additional copies.

6. POC for additional information is the undersigned, at 626-2415, or e-mail at timothy.c.davis16.mil@mail.mil.

//Original Signed//
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